DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 359 FL 003 759

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TITLE French Language Achievement: The Effect of Early Language Instruction on Subsequent Achievement.
INSTITUTION University City School District, Mo.
PUB DATE Jun 66
NOTE 5p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Educational Experiments; Elementary Schools; *Fles; *French; Junior High Schools; *Language Instruction; Language Skills; Modern Languages; Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

This study discusses the effect of early instruction in French in eight elementary schools on subsequent student achievement at the end of grades 7, 8, and 9. The Common Concepts Foreign Language Test in French was the criterion of achievement for the seventh-grade students. Results give averages, differences, and significance of the differences of the achievement and control variables. Discussion of the results indicates a marked superiority of the experimental over the control group. (RL)

ED 070359

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FRENCH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT

THE EFFECT OF EARLY LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION ON SUBSEQUENT ACHIEVEMENT

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June 1966

FL 003 759

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FRENCH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT

THE EFFECT OF EARLY LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION ON SUBSEQUENT ACHIEVEMENT

Conversational French was introduced in eight University City elementary schools in grades 4, 5, and 6 at the beginning of the 1962-1963 school year. Many fourth grade students who participated in the program during the next three years continued French instruction as seventh graders in 1965-1966.

The present study is being made in order to assess the effect, if any, of early instruction in French on subsequent achievement in French at the end of grades seven, eight, and nine.

Participating Students

Seventh grade University City pupils who had had three years of French in the elementary grades comprised the experimental group. Seventh grade pupils in two cooperating schools who had had little or no French instruction in the elementary grades served as the control group. (Six students with one year of French instruction in grades 2, 3, or 4, and one child who was tutored by his mother for part of a summer following grade 4 were included in the control group.) Fifty-two control students satisfied the criteria of little or no French study prior to junior high school.

Fifty-two University City students were chosen to match the control students for age, sex, and verbal and nonverbal I. Q.'s as determined by the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test. General background based on the nature of the two communities was assumed to be reasonably similar for the experimental and control groups. Each group received the same amount of instruction in seventh grade French, 20 minutes five times a week, by competent, well-qualified teachers.

Achievement Criterion

The Common Concepts Foreign Language Test in French was the criterion of achievement at the end of grade seven. It was administered by an impartial examiner to groups of 30 to 40 students in experimental and control schools. Tape recorded directions and test stimuli were used to provide uniform administration to all students. The test stimulus is a statement in French. The student indicates his understanding by marking the one of four standardized pictures which is pertinent to the statement.

Achievement Results

On the Common Concepts test the experimental group excelled the control group, on the average, by nearly 14 raw score points, the difference being highly significant statistically at the .005 level. The small differences in age, sex, and I. Q. between the groups indicated that they were well matched in these characteristics. The following table gives the averages, differences, and significance of the differences of the achievement and control variables.

Variable	Average		Difference	Significance
	Experimental	Control		
ACHIEVEMENT				
Common Concepts Test in French	43.21	29.44	13.77	.005
CONTROL				
Age in Months	156.69	156.77	- .08	N.S.
Sex	1.58	1.62	- .04	N.S.
Verbal I. Q.	125.48	125.02	.46	N.S.
Nonverbal I. Q.	129.69	130.58	- .89	N.S.

The .005 level of significance of the achievement difference favoring the experimental group indicates a very real difference with only a one-half-of-one percent possibility that the result was due to chance. For the control variables, the N.S. indicates no significant difference between the two groups in age, sex, and I. Q.

Discussion

The study shows that instruction in conversational French in grades 4, 5, and 6 substantially increases the achievement of students of French as measured by the Common Concepts Test at the end of grade seven compared with students without such instruction. This difference may have arisen from the experimental students increased familiarity with spoken French or possibly from an increased knowledge of vocabulary. The research design for this study calls for further testing of the 104 students in the experimental and in the control groups using the Modern Language Association Proficiency Test in French at the end of grades eight and nine. At this point it is premature to say why the difference occurs or whether it will be maintained. Hopefully, with the further research already planned this very important "why?" can be answered.

Mr. Anthony P. Mayeux, Foreign Language Consultant in University City, has observed:

> The results of this phase of the research are most encouraging since this was our honeymoon class. It is the first group of students to complete the formal elementary sequence. We have since found and trained more staff with some degree of French competency.
>
> Our materials were also new and had not been tried. They proved to be adequate for our purposes and did show a definite carryover into junior high as measured by the test.

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6-14-66